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ABSTRACT

External political pressures which influence the role and methodology of evaluation are described in the lead article by Henry M. Brickell. These influences, according to the author, are constantly present and are often more powerful in their effect than the actual evaluation findings. Based upon his experiences as an evaluator of educational programs under contract to different government agencies, Brickell presents case studies of political influences on evaluation studies, and offers suggestions for evaluators who are faced with similar problems. Gabriel Della-Piana, in a commentary on the first paper, extends Brickell's analysis and suggests ways to alleviate the problems resulting from political influences. One major problem--that evaluations are inaccurate because the evaluator has omitted negative findings--is illustrated by a number of specific examples. These examples are classed into three areas of coping deficiency: interference with the evaluator's task, inappropriate feedback, and biased decision making in order to avoid unfavorable consequences. A second commentary by William J. Wright is also included. Standards for evaluation contracts and for the performance of a credible evaluation are suggested. Responsibilities of clients and evaluators, specification of the report's audience, conflict of interest, measurement techniques, interpretation of results, and resolution of conflict are discussed. (GDC)

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In this issue:

Writing on the influence of political factors on evaluation are:

Henry M. Brickell is Director of Studies, Policy Studies in Education, New York, N.Y.

Gabriel Della-Piana is Director, Bureau of Educational Research, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

William S. Wright is a Senior Research Associate at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Brickell's lead article describes one set of experiences highlighting external political influences on the role and methodology of evaluation. These influences, according to Brickell, are always at work and in many instances are more powerful in their effect than the actual evaluation findings. Brickell presents a series of case studies, each typifying kinds and degrees of political influences on evaluation, and offers some suggestions that may help evaluators to cope with these influences.

Della-Piana extends Brickell's analysis and offers some directions implied in that analysis and the recommendations it leads to. Della-Piana suggests preventive measures to cope with political pressures by reducing their negative effects on the conduct and uses of evaluation. He describes three major coping problems—task interference, inappropriate feedback, and unfavorable balance of consequence—that limit the use of evaluation information for decision making, and suggests ways to alleviate these deficiencies.

Wright, who is also concerned with the need for evaluation to generate credible and useful information, examines ways to solve the problems resulting from political influences on evaluation. One solution is to generate standards for evaluation in terms of evaluation contracts and evaluation performance. The contractual standards relate to the respective responsibilities of client and evaluator, audience restrictions, and conflicts of interest. The performance standards relate to instrumentation and sampling, interpretation and reporting, and non-performance.

The Influence of External Political Factors On the Role and Methodology of Evaluation[1]

Henry M. Brickell

I have never studied the influence of external political factors on educational evaluation, and thus I cannot speak as a scholar of political influence. I will speak instead as a bullseye—a well-riddled target of political factors. I am an object of these influences rather than an investigator of them. I have learned about political forces the way an iron filing learns about magnetic forces.

From among the different viewpoints from which I might choose to speak—teacher, administrator, evaluator, student of evaluation—I am going to speak from the viewpoint of a person who heads a non-profit educational evaluation business. Our business has to attract customers and win contracts in order to survive. We live on contracts.

Our customers are federal, state, and local governments. If **political** means **governmental**, then our business environment is 100% political. That is, the external factors that influence our evaluation work (apart from the professional factors that influence it) are 100% political. The government officials who employ us are engaged in winning and exercising power — power to decide who gets what. These officials administer educational programs — or the other government officials who are above, beside, or beheath them administer these programs — and their jobs, salaries, promotions and even their careers are intertwined with the programs they hire us to evaluate.

Their motives in hiring us are political; that is, governmental. They seek our help in deciding how to exercise their power over who gets what (and to exercise it more rationally, we would hope). Even if the government officials who hire us do so only because they are obligated by their funding agency to employ an evaluator, their motives in employing us nevertheless have to do with winning and allocating resources. At the simplest, if they do not hire an evaluator, they cannot keep their money coming in.

Moreover, the government—be it federal, state, or local—is a layered complex of people. We have to treat government as a complex rather than as a single entity. We have to recognize that government officials are as likely to use the art of politics in dealing with each other as in dealing with outsiders. The evaluative evidence we supply becomes a card in the political deck used in the game called government.

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Examples of Political Influence in Evaluation

Before preparing this article, I turned to a number of evaluation reports produced by my organization in the hope of finding an example of an evaluation study where external political factors had been at work. It happened that the first report I examined contained a good example, and so did the second, the third, and the fourth. In fact, I did not find any that did not yield an example; some could constitute full-fledged case studies.

Center for the Study of Evaluation
UCLA

Eva L. Baker
Director

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Let me give you a few illustrations. The names of the individuals and the organizations in these examples have been changed so as to protect the guilty. If there is any recognizable resemblance between these descriptions and actual cases, blame it on my inability to erase the evidence. I hope you will not recognize any of these cases. As I said earlier, we still have to get more evaluation contracts from these same people.

Example 1

Some time ago we evaluated the use of paraprofessionals in the schools of a major American city. In an earlier study of paraprofessionals in that same city, we had found that people were happy with their work. The paraprofessionals themselves, the school principals, the teachers, the kids, and even the parents were quite satisfied. But this second study of paraprofessionals was to deal with the actual impact they were having on pupil learning.

Shortly after receiving our contract from the city board of education, we learned that paraprofessionals were not hired or paid by the central administration. Instead, they were selected and paid by the several area superintendents who headed the geographical subdivisions of the school system. While meeting with area superintendents to explain the study, one of their spokesmen opened up with something like this:

> *Okay, you evaluators. Let's get one thing straight from the start. We have these paraprofessionals here in these schools not only to help kids learn but to link us to the community. That's why we have them. That's why we're going to keep them. We're not looking for a report about test results that will cause any trouble with the board of education downtown. They've got their reasons for giving us the money to hire paraprofessionals; we've got our reasons for taking the money. So no matter what you find out about kids' achievement, we're going to keep our paraprofessionals. Don't make it difficult.*

Alerted thus, we made our study. And we were lucky that time. We found that the presence of paraprofessionals did in fact improve pupil achievement. Were we delighted! We never told anyone, of course, but the experimental groups became our home team and the control groups became the visitors from out of town. We sat at the edge of the field throughout the game, voicelessly cheering: "Make a significant difference!"

Example 2

On another occasion we were employed to study a graduate training program. We arrived on the scene, as we so often do, a few months before the director was to submit his renewal request to his funding agency. The director himself was relatively new. Since taking the job, he had made a significant number of improvements in the program, as he explained to us in an early interview. He had also explained these improvements to his dean and to his funding agency. Now all he needed was the evidence. We searched in vain. Nothing in the data we gathered demonstrated the effect of these improvements, and that is what we wrote in our draft report. Like so many others with whom we have worked, the director offered to assist us by reviewing our draft before we put it into print. (We always seem to get this kind of help, even if we do not ask for it.) The dean then offered to help the director review our draft. Both of them called us in for a long and agonizing interview in which they challenged the accuracy of the data, our method of data gathering, the

competency of our interviewers, our interpretation of the data, the tone of our writing, and the overall quality of our draft report. They sent us back to rewrite it completely, then required us to turn over the basic data to them for re-analysis, and they did not re-employ us to continue evaluating the program as they had originally intended. I do not know what ever happened to our promises to transmit the findings to the graduate trainees who had supplied the data for the findings.

Example 3

At another time we were serving as the external evaluator of a large-scale program for a federal agency. Our work included continuous reporting of progress in the program. The first submission we made was a formative evaluation report intended to help the program director and his staff get all activities properly launched. Our report was immediately returned to us (we had submitted it in draft, as usual) and we were told that 100 pages was too much help. The director could make do with a lot less. Besides, he and his staff felt that a fair amount of what we had to say was off target and not particularly useful. He asked us to shrink the length of the report, cut out some of the negative material, and try to write with a more balanced viewpoint. Then he could submit a copy of the report to his funding agency. We cut it in half, rethought the negative things we had said, eliminated some, and softened others.

Some time later, the entire program was transferred from one funding agency to another. The new agency found great fault with it and considered reducing its scope and its cost or terminating it altogether. Because we had not found that much fault with the program while serving as its external evaluator for the previous agency, we soon found ourselves siding with the program people against the new agency. Before many weeks had passed, we had become strong advocates of the program, thinking it was being unfairly treated by its new funders. You might say that we had begun to evaluate the behavior of the new agency. Moreover, we went to the top man in the agency, complained that his people were making a mistake, had them brought into his office, pointed out their errors, and appealed to him to stop them before they damaged the program. This was more awkward for us than you may realize; we had to win a new evaluation contract from the new agency in order to continue as the external evaluators. We worked our way through the situation by using the instinctive ability of every born evaluator: the ability to bite the hand that feeds you while seeming to be only licking it. Eventually, the funding agency decided to continue the program and to continue our services as external evaluator. Our relations have been only normally tense since that time.

Example 4

Some time ago one of our staff turned in a draft evaluation report to the project director in a local school district. The local director wrote us a letter in response, noting a number of points at which he felt we had misjudged the project. We compared his letter to our evaluation report and found that the project director had turned in a perfect scorecard; his letter singled out 100% of our negative findings. Our staff member was then called before the entire local project staff and asked to defend and justify the findings. My telephone rang at about noon the day the staff member went out to see them, and he said: "The meeting just ended here in the school district, and I have agreed to make some changes, even though I honestly think the report is right as it stands. But I have a problem with one point. The director says that if the superintendent ever sees my recommendation saying that the superintendent himself ought to give the project more personal support, he will probably cancel our contract. What do you want me to tell him?" I was incensed! I said: "Tell him your comment stands. Let the superintendent go ahead and cancel the contract." You can see that I was in no mood to be pushed around by a project director. We always take strong stands like that on contracts of less than $10,000.

Example 5

In another case a federal agency employed us to write an RFP calling for bids to evaluate more than $100 million worth of teacher training projects that had already been completed. The agency told us that it wanted the teacher training to be evaluated using pupil learning as the criterion. We said: "That's a terrible idea. Nobody can do that. Let's not put that in the RFP." The agency explained to us that pupil learning was the only criterion that really interested it. If teacher training didn't improve pupil learning, why should government spend money for it?

When we wrote the RFP, we were careful to work in a long section dealing with alternative criteria for evaluating teacher training: pupil learning, pupil behavior in immediate response to instruction, teacher learning, teacher behavior in immediate response to training, and so on. We tried to put enough clues in the RFP so that the bidders would be smart enough to reject pupil learning as a criterion, but they weren't.

After the government contracted with the winning bidder (a distinguished and nationally-known non-profit agency), the government hired us to monitor the contractor's work. Since we had written the RFP, we knew what the government expected of the contractor.

For six or eight months we watched the contractor attack the problem and shook our heads slowly, saying: "This isn't working; we knew it wouldn't work; he's not going to be able to solve the problem." But what should we report to the government? After all, we had written the RFP. Should we declare that nobody could do what we had called for? Or should we declare that this particular contractor could not do it? Our problem was worse than you might suspect. You see, our monitoring contract was of course conditional on the other agency's evaluation contract. Our PT boat was lashed to the side of its cruiser. If we fired a torpedo into his side, he would take us down with him. It took us some time to puzzle our way through the complex ethical considerations that occur to an evaluator at a time like this. Then, with mixed emotions, we fired the starboard tube. Down we went together. That did not make for good relationships between us and our professional colleagues in the other non-profit agency, and it wasn't good for our financial situation, either.

Example 6

On another occasion we were retained by a state education department that was then financing a number of computer-based information systems. Each system was directed by a more or less aggressive director, and each one was competing for scarce funds within the department. All of the directors had been appointed to a committee to help decide which services should be supported, which ones consolidated with the others, which ones terminated, and what new ones started.

The committee had so much difficulty reaching agreement about these seemingly simple questions that it brought us in as outsiders to study the several systems and recommend what the department should do with them. We

conducted the study with energetic assistance from the various directors.

Our final report (reviewed beforehand by the director of each system) managed to jump over the question of hardware compatibility by concluding that the big new fourth-generation computers now becoming available made the question obsolete. All of the software being used could be run on any hardware configuration. And our report managed to finesse our way out of the question of conceptual compatibility.

As to which systems should be collapsed, continued, or expanded, we said that that depended on market demands. And so we recommended a field survey of users' interests to gather data about market demands. Of course, we offered to make that study if they would hire us again.

The committee examined our report and decided that they did not need any more help of that kind. So we turned elsewhere and rounded up 50-odd clients—the 50-odd intermediate service units that were wholesaling the systems to retail customers in local school districts. The service units hired us to make a users' study. When we completed the final report, the steering committee representing the 50-odd units asked us to make press-numbered copies of the reports to prevent any of the units from loaning its copy of the report to the special state investigator, who was just at that time examining the performance of the intermediate service units. They did not want the state investigator to do a hatchet job on them, using our report as a sharpening stone. We tried to tell the truth in the report yet not sharpen the state investigator's weapon. I don't think we made it. The 50-odd units haven't been back to see us.

Example 7

In another case we were evaluating a 3-year-old project for a local school district. The innovation was being used in several schools at an extra cost of about $50,000 and was scheduled for expansion to the remaining schools if we found it successful or for termination if we did not. Don't take that too seriously. We have never yet made an evaluation study that the client permitted to decide the life or death of a project. Other factors, many of them more powerful than our findings, are always at work.

The innovation was expected to make a considerable improvement in cognitive as well as affective learning, according to what the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the principals had predicted to the board of education three years earlier. We designed a study, collected the data, made an analysis, and concluded that there was no significant difference between students in the experimental schools and comparable students in the other schools.

When we discussed the results informally with local personnel before writing the final report, we were offered good explanations of the findings. The principals explained that the board of education had not supplied full funding for the program. Rather, the board had cut the program back about half-way through, with the result that the principals could not buy the materials and hire the paraprofessionals needed to run the program full-scale. The central office administrators explained that the principals apparently had not given the teachers the necessary in-service training and classroom supervision needed to make the innovation work properly. The board of education explained that the administrators had for some reason not been able to deliver on their initial promises, despite the $50,000 extra for materials and paraprofessionals—a generous allocation that had caused parents in other schools to question the board's lopsided generousity. Each group suggested that we would be wise to reach its conclusions in our report.

In the final report, we said a combination of factors—some shortfall in performance by principals, central office administrators, and the board—had caused the disappointing results. We recommended that they run the program full-scale for three more years and, not surprisingly, that they hire us again so that we could give them the real answer as to whether the innovation was good enough to extend to the other schools.

Example 8

In another state we had a contract to evaluate a large number of special education materials centers. When we first submitted a draft of the study questionnaire to our client, we got some helpful reactions. The review committee suggested to us that we eliminate some of the more negative items from the instrument; that we shorten the negative end of scales that ranged from **strongly agree** to **strongly disagree** or from **very good** to **very bad**; that we not name any service that was not already being rendered to teachers; and that we not administer the instrument to teachers who had not been receiving the services. The review committee made other helpful suggestions as to how we could improve our questionnaires so that our findings would be more useful in winning needed support for continuing the special education centers in the next year, which was their objective in having the evaluation made. We modified the questionnaire, of course—we want to stay in business—although we argued the committee out of some of the changes they wanted.

Later, when the findings were in, we telephoned the client to discuss the style in which the recommendations should be written. Should they be addressed to the local directors of the special education centers, to their advisory councils of classroom teachers, or to state officials responsible for the program? What was the target audience? We gave two or three sample recommendations written in several styles. They said the choice among the three styles was easy; they didn't want any of them. They said to eliminate all recommendations. The findings probably would not cause any trouble, but the recommendations certainly could. We complied.

Example 9

At one time we worked for a state education department on the redesign of teacher education. It was in part an evaluation study. The design called for us to hold a series of meetings with the major parties at interest in teacher education: deans of schools of education, professors, school superintendents, school principals, classroom teachers, state department of education personnel, and citizens. We held 125 meetings with them to discuss what flaws existed in teacher education and how they ought to be corrected.

At the outset, the client asked us to begin the study of teacher education in October and file a final report complete with new institutional accreditation standards by December of the same year. I objected that three months was a little speedy: the client wanted a high participation study involving over 50 colleges and over 500 school districts and the topic was extremely complex, not to mention political. Besides, there were the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. The client said that the decision-making timetable in that particular state required action by January in order to affect teacher education two years later. Besides, he was under some pressure from teachers' groups and citizens' groups to get things moving. So we said we would try to finish by December. We failed, of course. By December we had not produced a convergence

of opinion among professors, teachers, school administrators, parents, and others on such questions as whether there should be performance-based standards for teacher education and certification. Issues like that take a little while to discuss.

When our client realized that we would not finish by December, he asked us at least to submit a progress report. So we drafted a 350-page (honestly!) progress report quoting verbatim from the minutes of the 125 meetings, taking care to represent all viewpoints, divergent as well as convergent. We dared not do anything except quote verbatim because we knew that otherwise the report would be rejected as inaccurate. When the participating groups received the progress report, they said two things: "This is way too long" and "You didn't include everything we said." So we wrote a second draft—396 pages. We submitted that one to our client, the state education department, which said, "This is way too long. Besides, where's the convergence you promised us when we gave you the contract in October?"

While our client wrestled with the second draft, the participating groups pored over it. They not only confirmed their thinking; the expanded it. That gave us the problem of taking their January-March thinking and working it into the draft as though it had occurred in December. We reworked the December draft to accommodate the corrections and the expanded thinking of our participants. By May we were still working on the December progress report. We had yet to satisfy our client and our review groups that we had produced an accurate progress report that captured the essence of everyone's thinking up to December—a progress report that would make the basis for further discussion in January, February, March, April, May, and so on.

You won't be surprised to learn that around the beginning of May the client called: "Look, I said December. You're taking too long." At that point, he took over the raw data, wrote a draft of the **final** report, and published it—doing something less than full justice to the promises he made to the participants about how their views would be used in shaping the redesign of teacher education.

But I had not been able to get universal agreement even on the December progress report. If my client didn't get a final report by May, he couldn't publish it in June; it couldn't go to the state board of education in September; the new regulations couldn't be put through public hearings in the fall; and the state legislature couldn't be notified in January that the new regulations would go into effect in September, 1976. So the client interrupted my orderly process. He took away the raw data. He wrote the final report.

Because I was advertised in the state for some months as Dr. Neutral from New York brought in as an honest broker between all the parties—promising, among other things, to defend the participants against unfair handling of their ideas by the state education department—my client still needed some kind of "final report" from me. We debated what it should say. I submitted a preface to his final report, saying that I worked on it from October through about March and had nothing to do with it after that. Following this disclaimer we spent considerable time discussing if I would later say what he wanted me to say. At the time of preparing this paper, these discussions were still going on.

Example 10

I once made a study of alternative ways of financing non-public schools. The Catholic schools in a New England state were in considerable financial difficulty. A state legislative commission consisting of 25 members had been created to determine whether public funds should be used to help these schools, or whether they should be allowed to go under. Among other things, the commission wanted to know how much damage would be done to the public schools if the non-public schools collapsed and all their students suddenly transferred to public schools.

The commission was a cross-section of the state. Every viewpoint was represented. We had the advocates of Catholic schools and we had their opponents; we had the advocates of other private schools and their opponents; we had the parents who wanted financial aid and taxpayers who opposed it; we had public school people; we had the American Civil Liberties Union. Every voice had a place at the table.

With every politically significant interest represented, I found myself in the most neutral political environment I had ever worked in. The competing interests had to debate and come to terms with each other as to how the inquiry was to be made before the chairman could give me my marching orders. When I submitted plans for collecting data, turned in findings, or drafted recommendations, all of them had to be adjudicated among the commission members before the chairman could sign off on them. The effect of that, so far as I was concerned, was to neutralize various political factors and let me operate free of political considerations—free in the special sense that the competing forces were adjudicated before they could reach me and work their separate and conflicting influences on me.

Summary

Are there external political factors that influence the role and methodology of evaluation? You bet there are. And they are powerful.

Because the seeking, the winning, and the exercising of power are a prominent part of life within an institution as well as between institutions, internal evaluation staffs are just as subject to political influences as external evaluation staffs. Perhaps you have noticed that.

Sometimes political forces control the populations we can sample. Sometimes they limit the data we can gather. Sometimes they shape our instruments. Sometimes they influence the designs we can use. Sometimes they guide our interpretations. Sometimes they shape our recommendations. Sometimes they touch the wording of our reports. And they always influence the impact of what we recommend.

I think I have never written an evaluation report without being conscious of the fact that what I say will be used in the winning and the exercising of power, that my findings are going to be lined up on one side or the other of a contest that somebody else has already set up, and that jobs are on the line—maybe my own job.

Once in a great while, I have had the privilege of sitting as a member—a nameless member—of a panel of judges and have been able to write a recommendation I thought the project director would never see. But much more often I have had to face him, his staff, his employer, and his funding agency and watch their faces as they hear, challenge, or attack my methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Even if the subject of the evaluation is absent, I can never forget that the project monitor in the funding agency frequently identifies himself with the project and becomes its champion. So I have to think of the effect of my report on him, and on the larger program of which the project is a part, and on the agency sponsoring the program. Indeed, I even have to think about the overall fate and the future of research and development in education. I don't have to tell you that research, development, and evaluation are them-

selves enterprises for which somebody has to win and exercise power in the legislative and political arenas in order to decide who gets what. I often find myself wondering whether my evaluation reports, even as they help the profession win small battles against unsatisfactory projects, simultaneously help it lose the war for research, development, and experimentation. But that is another matter.

Let me finish by giving some rules for escaping the influence of external political factors. Let me offer five such rules:

- Do not work for anyone who has anything to do with the project you are evaluating.
- Employ exactly the same objectivity and the detachment you would use in undertaking a research study where **you** pick the problem, where **you** set up hypotheses of **your own** choosing, where **you** gather data without external restrictions, and where **you** draw **your own** conclusions.
- Report your findings in such a way that they have no implications whatsoever for the project you are evaluating.
- Do not work for the government—local, state, or federal—and try not to work for philanthropic foundations.
- Be independently wealthy.

If you can follow these rules, you can escape the influence of external political factors on your work as an evaluator.

As for myself, I am not going to follow any one of these rules. My organization would go out of business as evaluators if we tried it. We are going to have to struggle along with a few other rules, much spongier ones, and try to make the best of a political world. Here they are:

- Try to understand how the client thinks. Find out what he has to gain or lose from the evaluation. He may have the gains in mind before he awards the contract, but he will think about nothing but the possible losses once the evaluator sets to work. One client said to me just the other day—speaking, I thought, for all of his breed—"Studies just make trouble."
- Reassure the client at the outset that you can interpret the findings so as to give helpful suggestions for program improvement—no matter what the findings of the study are.
- Find out what the powerful decision makers—the client and those who surround him—will actually use as criteria for judging the success of the project. Gather and present evidence addressed to these criteria. You may, if you wish, also gather data on the official objectives of the project or even on objectives that happen to interest you. But never try to substitute these for data addressed to criteria the decision makers will use.
- Try to get a supervisory mechanism set up for the evaluation contract that contains a cross-section of all the powerful decision makers. Try to get it designed so that the members have to resolve the conflicts among themselves before giving you marching orders for the study or deciding whether to accept your final report.
- Write the report carefully, especially when describing shortcomings and placing blame, and do mention any extenuating circumstances. The client will appreciate that. Review the draft final report before submitting it to the client for his review, making sure in advance that you can defend any claim you make.

Following these rules will not help you escape political influences. The most they can do is help you cope with them.

Comments on 'The Influence of External Political Factors On the Role and Methodology of Evaluation'

Gabriel Della-Piana

Brickell's paper is successful. It provokes and warrants an extension of remarks. The description of his experience as a target of political shots certainly forces the reader's attention to the issues. The most serious criticisms one might make is that his analysis, though right on target, is not comprehensive and his informal style may be misleading. I take some space for describing what Brickell says partly to structure it in my own terms for my own extensions which follow and partly because the intentionally informal style of Brickell's presentation may distract the casual reader from the significance of his remarks or even influence a misreading.

My comments summarize what I think Brickell says and suggest the direction that might be taken in extending his analysis and the analysis implied by his recommendations. My focus is on the kind of analysis that leads to preventive measures—an analysis which suggests ways of coping with political pressures so as to reduce their negative effects on the conduct and uses of evaluation.

What Brickell says

Brickell tells us he is a businessman. He gets evaluation contracts. His aim is to stay in business. A variety of forces conspire to influence how he carries out his contracts. Politics influence what populations he samples, what kind of information he obtains, how he analyzes it, and how he reports his procedures, data, interpretations, and recommendations. If one wishes to stay in business there are occasions when negative findings must be eliminated from reports or played down, he says. There are occasions when one does not even have this option; instead, the contract is terminated and someone else reanalyzes and reports the data. And even with reports compromised to avoid criticism one cannot be assured that the findings of an evaluation study will be used in the decision-making process. So what is one to do? The answer is cope. And how does one cope? Mostly by getting information early and using it, Brickell suggests. What kind of information? Answers to questions such as: Who are the decision makers in the evaluation con-

text? What does the client see as the possible positive and negative consequences for himself in the evaluation? What will the client use as criteria to judge project success?

So the information is collected. And how is this information used? First, it is used to make organizational arrangements that reduce conflicting political pressures and minimize unsuspected pressures which otherwise may be brought to bear to alter the nature of the report late in the project. For example, a supervisory mechanism with representatives of all powerful decision makers could be set up. Brickell illustrates how an advisory council of powerful decision makers neutralized the political influence on the evaluator. But the early and continuous involvement of powerful decision makers may also influence planning and execution of an evaluation so as to minimize unsuspected pressures later for changes in evaluation reports. Second, the information is used to plan the evaluation. For example, the evaluator could include assessment of those things about a program that the client sees as significant in addition to official objectives or objectives that seem to be of special interest. Third, the information is used to reduce negative consequences to the client. For example, the client could be reassured with respect to the positive posture the report will take on matters about which he is anxious. And the report might be written in such a way that loopholes or extenuating circumstances allow the client to extricate himself from responsibility for whatever negative findings occur. And what will be the outcome of this way of coping? Survival at least. Beyond that Brickell does not speculate.

My own view

First I must make an assumption about the basic purpose of the evaluator beyond "staying in business." Let us restrict ourselves to the evaluation of educational programs, and let us say a program is any continuing educational activity that is designed to change the behavior of its participants. In this context, the evaluator's purpose is to describe what happened in a way that generates information which may be useful for educational decision making. If that is the case, then a consideration of political pressures must be focused on the kinds of analyses that lead to ways of coping. But the ways of coping must maximize making the evaluator's purpose happen in such a way that limitations in the usefulness of information obtained and reported are minimally due to political pressures.

Now let us consider the further analysis that would be desirable beyond what Brickell has done for us. Table 1 summarizes my view of Brickell's analysis (implicit if not

TABLE 1

Coping Deficiency Analysis Implied by Brickell and Extensions of the Analysis Categories for One Performance Problem of Evaluators

The Performance Problem: In response to political pressures the evaluator eliminates or plays down the negative findings in reports and thus presents an inaccurate or misleading picture.

Coping Deficiency Areas	Brickell's Examples of Coping Deficiences	A More Complete Breakdown of Coping Deficiency Categories
Task interference	• Powerful decision makers do not get involved until late in the evaluation process and then press for changing reports of negative findings. • Evaluator is not budgeted to make late changes nor comfortable with tampering with report of findings.	• Time not allocated or insufficient for tasks related to managing political pressures. • Personnel not allocated to tasks related to involvement of decision makers. • Personnel have competing tasks due to lack of a contractual decision-by-person matrix which specifies who (e.g., evaluator, program director, administrator, community representative, etc.) signs off in what way (e.g., approves, disapproves, reviews, is informed) on what decisions (e.g., specify objectives for study, approve assessment instruments, review designs, specify kind of report for different target audiences, etc.). • Evaluation tools absent or inadequate for guiding evaluation plan development and execution appropriate to the stage of program development or appropriate to the decisions to be made.
Inappropriate feedback	• Reports stress unfavorable findings rather than constructive uses and decisions to be made and strengths of programs or client performance.	• Feedback to decision makers is untimely or lacking in specificity or too complex or unclear or full of redundancies. • Feedback too rare or infrequent. • Feedback does not point out positive consequences to client for appropriate or desired action. • Feedback delivered by inappropriate sources (e.g., persons not respected, feared, not trusted, not objective, not constructive).
Unfavorable balance of consequences	• Payoff for powerful decision makers is great for avoiding negative findings (e.g., don't cause me difficulties). • Payoff for evaluator (e.g., continued funding) is great to modify negative findings.	• Lack of positive consequences to decision makers for supporting effective evaluation. • Lack of positive immediate consequences to evaluator for effective evaluation activities. • Lack of negative consequences to decision makers and evaluators for inappropriate evaluation activities. • Presence of negative consequences to decision makers and evaluators for appropriate evaluation activities.

explicit in his paper). It also provides more complete extensions of the analysis categories for **one** performance problem in which an evaluator must cope with political pressure.

Here is how one might examine the table. The problem that is considered is as follows: some evaluators tamper with reports to the extent of eliminating negative findings rather than suffering the consequences of either extra work in revising the report without a budget for it or losing income due to contract termination. The table provides an outline of three kinds of deficiencies in coping that contribute to this performance problem of evaluators. They are (1) inability to cope with task interference, (2) lack of management of appropriate feedback, and (3) lack in managing a balance of consequences favorable to the desired evaluator performance. Let us look at "task interference." The key example from Brickell is a lack of scheduling and managing involvement of powerful decision makers at the appropriate stage to prevent a sudden, later interference. But the matter is more complex than that; task interference of this sort involves time scheduling, resource allocation, management of task assignments with clear specification of responsibilities, availability of tools and staff for accomplishing the task, etc. Thus, if the evaluation project staff worked out these tasks in the more complete analysis, it would be unlikely that late in the game they would have to cope with **as much** task interference. In each case then, the "more complete" breakdown of coping deficiency categories suggests more things to manage or take into account in the planning and implementation of an evaluation. The implication is that there would be fewer performance deficiencies of the type illustrated.

Evaluators and program personnel should find many possible uses for the categories resulting from such an analysis. The categories are likely to help in "coping" with political pressure in a preventive way as well as improving evaluation and the use of evaluation. Further, they may be used as a checklist in planning studies, as a prompting list for review of problems, or as a stimulus to developing procedural guides. Further elaboration or illustration of such uses must wait for a more appropriate time or context.

In summary, an examination of Table 1 points up two significant observations. First, Brickell's analysis focused on some powerful political variables relevant to the evaluator's performance deficiencies. Second, an elaboration of these variables suggests a greater variety of things to examine in an analysis of the political problems of the evaluator. Though my comments do not extend to formal recommendations, the implications of the broader analysis suggest a great variety of options for the evaluator along the lines outlined by Brickell in his recommendations. For example, recommendations for coping with "task interference" go beyond the broad goal of setting up an early and continuous involvement of powerful decision makers. The elaborated categories for analysis of coping deficiencies for "task interference" imply that one must allocate staff time to tasks related to the management of political pressure, specify points of involvement (objectives specifications, test model selection, sample selection, etc.) at which different persons sign off in different ways, and design different evaluation strategies for different stages of program development (e.g., one with apparently high impact and difficult to define process and expected outcomes versus one with apparently low impact and clearly stated process and expected outcomes).

Comments on 'The Influence of External Political Factors On the Role and Methodology of Evaluation'

William J. Wright

In his paper Brickell provides a rich variety of explicit examples of the political influences that affect evaluation.[1] By doing so, he forces us to focus our attention on the boundary line between political realities and ethical values, and to see that the demarcation is not easily discernible. One can imagine two individuals arguing the merits of this paper. The first might argue that Brickell has identified reasonable and responsible strategies for dealing with the real world. He or she might suggest that Brickell has provided excellent advice on the way in which an enterprise dependent on "soft money" needs to operate in order to stay in business and provide evaluation services to those who seek such. The other reader might decry the expendiency underlying both Brickell's rules and the way in which some of the problem situations he faced were resolved. This reader might suggest that if evaluation is as devoid of ethical principles as this paper seems to suggest, then it is little wonder that its products are so unheeded.

The truth perhaps can be found between these extremes. One way to think of Brickell's paper is as a report from the front lines. Brickell has been a leader in the field of evaluation for quite some time. He has here provided a first-hand view of some of the forces that have assaulted his efforts, and alerted those who follow as to what awaits them. It is incumbent upon the latter to prepare themselves accordingly.

The primary issue raised by this paper is, then, the need to examine ways of solving the problems resulting from the inevitable intertwinement of politics and evaluation not merely as individuals, but as a profession. Evaluators are employed not just because people are obligated to employ an evaluator by their funding agency. Presumably it is because those who create or who direct the funding agency believe that evaluation will generate **credible** information on which decisions can in part be based. If evaluation is to grow as a profession, then we need to ensure that that belief is warranted. We need to help one another to examine our values and behavior in a way that will promote confidence in the worth of our efforts.

The first step in such a process ought to be an examination of whether there are commonly held, basic values among those who class themselves as evaluators.[2] If such exist, and I believe they do, then we ought to generate standards for evaluation which are consonant with these values. These standards could be akin to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests*.[3] There are two general areas in which standards might be

[1] All too often these problems are ignored or dealt with on a sub-rosa basis. Notable exceptions are the contributions of House (1973), Cohen (1973), and Kearney and Huyser (1973).

[2] Value differences among evaluators do exist. If core values can be identified, or if dialogue among representatives of various points of view can produce agreement about core values, then the differences which exist need not negate the desirability or feasibility of establishing standards.

[3] A precedent exists for this suggestion. George Madaus of the joint APA, AERA, NCME committee which prepared the 1974 revision argued the need for a companion volume on evaluation in a memorandum to his committee colleagues.

generated—contracts and performance. Each area will be discussed briefly as will the possible benefits and the limitations of evaluation standards. Although a few examples of the kinds of standards envisioned are provided, their inclusion is simply illustrative. Whatever standards do emerge ought to represent the concensual judgment of a substantial number of prestigious evaluators.

Contractual Standards

Most professions have general guidelines which assist their members in determining appropriate professional arrangements. Brickell's paper illustrates the need for similar standards in at least three areas.[4]

Respective responsibilities

About half of the cases cited by Brickell involved misunderstandings between the client and the evaluator about what the respective responsibilities were. Often, as this sample of cases makes clear, the evaluator is expected to answer questions which either cannot be answered at all in the current situation or which cannot be answered given the resources available. The contract should limit the scope of the inquiry by identifying those critical questions which will and those which will not be answered.

Sometimes the evaluator discovers that an important objective has been overlooked by the client in preparing the evaluation contract. Brickell's instance of the paraprofessional project evaluation is a good example. In this case the evaluator's charge was to investigate the impact of paraprofessionals on student learning. Yet the area superintendents had their own reasons for wanting paraprofessionals in the schools, namely, cementing community relations. When this situation occurs, the evaluator ought to identify the objective which is not part of the charge as an important, but unanswerable question given the current resources. Perhaps in addition, he or she ought to request more resources and a revised contract so as to permit an expanded investigation.

Contracts should also identify client responsibilities. For example, when a client restricts access to necessary information, the client thereby accepts responsibility for the inevitably flawed report. Given multiple client groups, there should be, as Brickell advises, a mechanism for resolving conflicts before the evaluator gets his marching orders.

Audience Restrictions

Contracts should also stipulate the restrictions to be placed on the use of the resulting report. The third case cited by Brickell illustrates this point particularly well. The evaluator, hired to conduct a formative evaluation, is asked to write a report which can be used to justify continuation to the funding agency. If the evaluator is to help a program or project improve while it is in development, then the failings and flaws need to be carefully examined so that the client can determine what corrective actions are required. Yet, documenting one's inadequacies is seldom the best approach to use in soliciting funding. Indeed, if a funding agency wants an objective evaluation which meets their own criteria, then they should contract directly with an evaluator. Forcing a funded client to hire an evaluator whose reports go to the funding agency is rather like asking the infested country to provide a per diem for one's resident spies.

Conflicts of interest

Sometimes one is faced with a situation which raises questions of conflict of interest. Brickell's fifth case involves the preparation of an RFP which was deemed "undoable." The preparer then agreed to evaluate the performance of the contractor and judged it inadequate. Given the role of the evaluator in the RFP preparation and the expectation of failure, it would seem that a conflict of interest existed.

The fifth case, and the third case as well, involved the employment of an external evaluator whose continued employment was contingent on some degree of success by the evaluated project. In such cases favorable evaluation promotes both project continuation and continuation of the evaluator's funding. The conflict of interest seems apparent.

The issue of whether someone who has been responsible for a formative evaluation, and thus presumably assisted the program to achieve its goals, should also conduct the summative evaluation, while not illustrated by Brickell, has also been an issue of concern in regard to conflict of interest.[5]

None of us is in a position to criticize the contractual arrangements of others. In the absence of standards one is forced to rely exclusively on personal judgment. And, indeed, one has to applaud the "firing of the torpedo" in Brickell's fifth case. It takes courage and a strong commitment to principle to act contrary to one's economic self-interest. The question of how to avoid such dilemmas, however, remains. The establishment of standards might provide a partial answer.

Performance Standards

Reasonable contract standards can only go so far in solving the problems illustrated in Brickell's paper. Standards for performance would also seem to be indicated.

Instrumentation and Sampling

In the eighth case cited by Brickell, the questionnaires developed for use in the evaluation were modified at the insistence of the client. Negative items were eliminated, and negative ends of the scales were apparently shortened. Moreover, the client urged that the sample to whom the questionnaire was to be given be altered. We don't know if the evaluator complied.

Not enough is known about what affect the client's suggestions had on the evaluation in question to address the cited case directly, but some general comments seem in order. If it is the responsibility of the evaluator to provide credible information, then he or she must insist on the right to collect evidence in which confidence can be placed. One simply cannot ignore the possibility of negative findings because the client would prefer it that way. To do so would be to ultimately destroy any confidence that one could place in positive findings—could place in evaluation.

Interpretation and Reporting

In the case just cited, the client attempted to steer the evaluator onto a "positive results only" tack. The report was then to be used to secure continued funding. The issue of the responsibility of the evaluator for the use which is made of his or her efforts is thus raised. The concern is a general

[4]A compilation by Robert Stake (1974) of the answers of prominent researchers to seven questions concerning evaluation contracts offers valuable insights into the process of preparing an evaluation contract. The responses of these individuals make it clear that even experienced evaluators and researchers perceive the need for contractual specifications that are more clear about respective rights and responsibilities of client and evaluator than has been typical to date. Explicit standards in this area might prove very beneficial, especially for the new practitioner.

[5]The October 1974 issue of the newsletter of the AERA Special Interest Group: Educational Research and Development Evaluators, for example, focuses on this question.

one since even if a priori agreements are reached concerning how a report is to be used, that does not constitute an inviolable guarantee.

Hume's truism states that "Inference is never fully justified logically," and there are usually multiple interpretations one can arrive at from the same data set. Yet, one sometimes has to draw the line, to distinguish between differences in interpretation and misrepresentation, to reject the kind of "help" in report preparation to which Brickell frequently alludes. But the client is also clearly free to reject the evaluator's report. The question then becomes: what is the responsibility of the evaluator when the client, or someone else, reports the results of the evaluation and the evaluator disagrees with the report issued?

This question is not as easy to answer as one might suspect at first glance. Rebuttal, for example, could be quite costly in terms of the personal or corporate financial resources of the evaluator. The consequences in terms of future contracts could be disastrous. If the misrepresentation is perpetrated by the press or broadcast media, there may be no feasible recourse. In the development of standards one issue which could be addressed might be the establishment of some mechanism whereby the evaluator could turn to his or her colleagues, e.g., to an established panel on the ethics of evaluation. If they determine that a particular interpretation is indubitably in error, then more than a single voice would be raised in protest.

Nonperformance

There are, however, pariahs among the paragons. A client ill-served by an evaluator should have some recourse. A mechanism for resolving critical disputes should perhaps be considered. The history of professional groups which attempt to judge nonperformance or malfeasance through appeal boards and similar means is not replete with success as the efforts of the American Medical Association and local police review boards bear witness. Yet, some arbitration models have proved fruitful in other areas, and might be useful in our field as well.

Benefits and Limitations

There are several benefits that could emerge from the generation of evaluation standards. They would not be a substitute for the education of administrators and other clients in the purposes and methods of evaluation. Yet, their existence might facilitate that process and provide a useful reference tool for the client who is negotiating or monitoring an evaluation contract. Moreover, an informed clientele would perhaps be less likely to make unreasonable or unethical requests of evaluators.

A more general understanding of the limited role of evaluation might also be promoted by the generation of evaluation standards. In Brickell's first case, the paraprofessionals were viewed by the principals as being of great value because of their impact on community relations. The evaluation focused exclusively on student achievement outcomes. If there were no student learning gains, should the project have been scrapped? The principals would state that the evaluation was too limited. I, for one, would agree, and would argue further that such is inevitably the case. Evaluation can provide some of the data on which decisions ought to be based. It should not be viewed as a substitute for a reasonable decision-making process.

Finally, with the existence of standards, evaluation would move closer to becoming an identifiable profession. Those few who are unprincipled enough to use the cloak of evaluation to disguise unprincipled or shoddy information collection practices would be more easily recognized by their potential clients who would, in turn, have a clearer picture of their own responsibilities and a more solid basis for their expectations.

Of course, standards would not be a panacea. Circumstances will often occur that raise ethical and political difficulties for which there are no completely satisfactory solutions. Vigilance against the substitution of codified standards for a thoughtful, professional conscience will be necessary. There will no doubt be areas of fundamental disagreement among reasonable evaluators, and each of us will have to make our own decisions, hopefully, based on publicly communicated values.

The advantages of the testing standards have, however, outweighed any attendant disadvantages at least insofar as the membership of APA, AERA and NCME seem to be concerned. The same would probably hold true of standards for evaluation. Moreover, in a recent publication the National Council on Education Professions Development (1974) wrote:

> Despite the increasing expenditures, need, and significance for mustering the kind of evidence sought by evaluation research, both the quality and use of such evidence has been quite disappointing. Evaluation of Federal programs in education has proceeded on an ad hoc, improvisational basis with little provision for the conditions necessary to ensure adequate quality or valid use of the evidence produced by evaluation research. (p. 2)

The council recommends that the Congress require the executive branch to establish evaluation policy which "... should set forth the larger purposes of evaluation as a tool of government and should establish its metes and bounds." (p. 3)

Given this press, it would seem that steps ought to be taken to ensure that when evaluation standards do emerge, they represent the thinking of the members of the profession rather than some governmental bureaucracy. Insofar as Brickell's paper is a catalyst for serious consideration of ethical and political problems in evaluation, it makes a very valuable contribution to the field. If steps are taken to generate standards for evaluation, it will have served very well indeed.

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CSE COMMENTS

In July 1975 the Center for the Study of Evaluation announced the appointments of Eva L. Baker as CSE Director and Adrianne Bank as Associate Director. The appointments were made by John I. Goodlad, Dean of the UCLA Graduate School of Education, following the resignation of Marvin C. Alkin, Director of CSE since 1968.

Eva Baker, an associate professor on the UCLA faculty, has been affiliated with the Center since 1969. In addition to teaching and other responsibilities within the UCLA Graduate School of Education, she is active in a number of professional organizations, including the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council of Measurement in Education. She serves on the AERA Research Training Committee and has been recently elected to three-year terms as Member-at-Large for both AERA and Division 15 of APA. Professor Baker has published extensively on the topics of evaluation, teacher education, and instructional research and development; she is co-author of a five-book series on teacher education and author of a chapter in AERA's *Second Handbook of Research on Teaching*. She has served as a consultant to community college development programs, state departments of education, local school districts, research and development centers, and the National Institute of Education. In her role as CSE Director, she will be drawing on her experience in educational research, evaluation, teacher education, and instructional product development.

Adrianne Bank served as Acting Associate Director prior to her present appointment. Before joining the CSE senior staff in 1972, Dr. Bank was Coordinator of the League of Cooperating Schools of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A). She has been a member of the Graduate School of Education's Teacher Education Laboratory and has also taught in high school and adult education programs. Dr. Bank has been active in women's organizations and in school-community advisory councils both as a member and as a consultant in research design, product development, and problem-solving.

Beginning with this issue, CSE Comments will report on some of the current activities at CSE, and from time to time may mention work going on in the field in general.

CSE projects are staffed by senior professionals, faculty affiliates, visiting scholars, and graduate researchers. One of the projects, CSE Field Services, provides technical assistance to evaluation practitioners and concerned staff at state departments of education, county departments, school districts, and individual schools. This technical assistance, which draws upon CSE's expertise in the conduct of evaluations and the products/resources it has developed, can be delivered at cost by CSE staff or, in some cases, can be used with no assistance from CSE. The technical assistance provided by project staff often combines evaluation workshops and "how-to-do-it" kits, and may range from such broad evaluation activities as needs assessment, program planning, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation, to specific concerns such as choosing an evaluation design or selecting/developing measures. Resources can be combined and adapted to meet particular evaluation problems and needs. CSE Field Services will discuss your situation and recommend CSE materials you may purchase directly, recommend materials developed by other R&D Centers or Regional Laboratories, or deliver technical assistance using materials and manner of presentation suited to the particular problem.

For further information, contact

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Last year Phi Delta Kappa began a new professional organization—the Evaluation Network. This international, interdisciplinary network provides access to training materials or procedures, serves as a clearinghouse, sponsors workshops and symposia on evaluation, addresses the issue of standards for evaluation, and sponsors relevant publications through its newsletter, *Evaluation News*.

If you would like to join, send your name, affiliation/address, telephone, and a check for $5.50 made payable to Phi Delta Kappa to:

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We are pleased to announce the founding of a new Journal — *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. The Journal is published three times yearly and is jointly sponsored by The School of Education at Tel Aviv University in Israel, The Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California at Los Angeles in the U.S.A., and The Institute for Science Education (IPN) at the University of Kiel in West Germany.

The Journal is designed for evaluation theorists, educational planners, curriculum developers and instructional designers, and curriculum evaluators. The Journal is intended to acquaint the reader with empirical evaluation studies and ideas which have a bearing on the practical aspects of appraising instruction, learning schemes, and educational materials. Articles will reflect differing philosophies and methodologies, will span many disciplines, and relate to a wide range of age groups. Evaluation studies conducted in different countries will be presented to inform readers of evaluation activities around the world.

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